



*Advancing  
Astronomy and  
Geophysics*

## ROYAL ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY

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### MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING 11 DECEMBER 2008 AT 1300 IN THE COUNCIL ROOM

**1. PRESENT:** Professor A.C. Fabian (President), Professor M.E. Bailey, Professor A.M. Cruise, Professor M.A. Hapgood, Professor I.D. Howarth (Vice-Presidents), Professor P.G. Murdin (Treasurer), Dr H.J. Walker, Professor M.A. Barstow and Dr I.A. Crawford (secretaries), Dr A.J. Ball, Dr R.J. Barber, Dr P.K. Browning, Dr I.F. Corbett, Professor M.G. Edmunds, Dr J. Greaves, Professor J.H. Hough, Professor R. Ivison,.

**IN ATTENDANCE:** D. Elliott and R. Massey

**APOLOGIES:** Dr L. Fletcher, Professor B.K. Gibson, Professor V. Nakariakov and Dr J.A. Wild

#### 2. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of 9 October 2008 were corrected, approved and signed

#### 3. MATTERS ARISING

**3.1** The Geophysical Secretary informed Council that following the BGA AGM in February he expected to bring forward a formal resolution to the March meeting to incorporate the BGA as a committee of the Society

#### 4. PRESIDENT'S BUSINESS

**4.1** The President reported that he had attended meetings about the Wakeham Review at the Institute of Physics and the Foundation for Science and Technology. At the latter the Chief Officer of STFC had stressed the 'economic impact' that publicly funded research was expected to have. He had noted that the UK's scientific infrastructure, and the trained people to use it, was based on the conviction that 'scientific research is central to driving forward the economy, dealing with global threats to security and the environment, enhancing the quality of life and in making the UK an attractive place to live, and invest in'. The President in the subsequent discussion had noted that such an emphasis could disadvantage the sciences represented by the RAS.

The same points were made in a subsequent meeting with Professor Adrian Smith, the new Director General of Science and Research, DIUS who had offered the opinion that the 'golden age' of astronomy funding was over, that astronomers needed to leave their 'ivory

towers', desist from criticising their budgetary provision and engage in tackling 'real world' problems like global warming and energy supplies. Professor Smith, and the DIUS official Paul Williams who was present at the meeting, were, however, impressed by the argument that UK astronomy's position, which is second only to the USA by most measures, could be easily lost.

The President invited Council to comment on how the Society should respond to the increasing emphasis on 'economic impact' referring to the recent STFC Council meeting which had applauded the Particle Physics Community's initiative to invite project proposals for research into 'real world' issues. His own view was that although the language used by government seemed inimical to astronomy research, and that earlier hopes which may have been entertained that the Wakeham Review would produce additional funds for astronomy had been dashed, it would be retrograde to divert resources from peer reviewed projects to audience pleasing ventures of doubtful value.

In discussion, while this conclusion was supported, it was generally agreed that while the Government accepted the importance of and need to fund fundamental research, it expected those benefiting from public support to demonstrate how their activities contributed to national welfare, for example, through the careers outside academe to which PhD students brought transferable skills from the research laboratory. The Society, probably, had no choice but to embrace and use the language of 'economic impact', defined in the widest sense, and indeed broadcast more effectively the many ways in which astronomy research already contributes to the performance of UK PLC

**4.2** The President reported that the External Organisational Review of STFC had been delayed owing to the illness, and subsequent replacement, of its chair, Dr David Grant. However it, along with the STFC draft Corporate Strategy, was expected imminently

**4.3** The 'Astronomy Forum', the President explained, was the name coined for the group it was agreed at the Away Day should be formed to discuss and debate issues facing astronomy research in the run up to the next Spending Round. Each of the almost 30 universities undertaking astronomy research had been invited to nominate one professor to represent the relevant departments and institutes in their institutions. The 'Forum', which would be independent of the RAS, but meet under the leadership of the President and with the administrative support of the Executive Secretary, would invite STFC to attend as required. Council would be fully briefed about its discussions which might form the basis for RAS policy statements. Both STFC and representatives of the Standing Committee of Astronomy Professors (SCAP) had welcomed this initiative.

## **5. POLICY & PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT**

**5.1** Professor Hapgood reported on the Economic Impact Study which the Society, with the IoP, STFC and EPSRC, was jointly sponsoring. The study, he noted, was being undertaken by Oxford Economics (OE) and overseen by a Steering Committee on which he is the Society's representative. Its approach was to trace the various elements of fundamental physics knowledge that underpin particular technologies to try to derive an estimate of the economic value derived from it. The initial phase of the study, to test and refine the study methodology, was a set of three pilot case studies viz display technologies, location and timing (i.e. GPS and equivalent) and superconducting magnets. 'Location and timing' would exploit RAS science (e.g. relativity, Earth orientation, ionospheric effects) and draw on expertise from Fellows. Assuming the study continued after the pilot stage it would be important to examine areas in

which the sciences represented by the Society played a significant part, not overlooking their indirect impact on creative industries, especially cinema, television and literature.

**5.2** Professor Hapgood reported that the STP community view tended to be that funding for those parts of the discipline relating to planet Earth should transfer to NERC, not least because of the Research Councils' positioning of them under an 'environmental banner'; other areas, the community felt, should remain with STFC. He added that a decision was expected to be made in January and therefore it was important to communicate the Society's views as a matter of some urgency. At the request of Council he agreed to draft a letter for the President to send to Professor Ian Diamond, Chair of the RCUK

**5.3** The Policy Officer invited Council to send him contributions to form the basis of the Society's submission to the IUSS Committee Review 'Putting Science and Engineering at the heart of Government Policy'. In particular on whether the views of the science and engineering community were, or should be, central to the formulation of government policy; the case for a regional science policy (versus national science policy); whether the Haldane principle needed updating and, finally, the role stakeholders, including Learned Societies, in determining UK science and engineering policy

**5.4** The Chair of the Higher Education Committee, Professor Hough, asked Council to note the Society's submission to the RCUK / UUK consultation on full Economic Costing (fEC). In particular he drew attention to the following statements:

*The RAS strongly believes that fEC funding associated with a science research grant should be used to advance that science research. HEIs should be consistent in their practice and as a matter of principle use the fEC funding to reward groups which win grant funding. The different Research Councils should also seek assurances from HEIs that fEC funding is being used to support the groups which secure the fEC-attracting grants. Even if the HEI elects to retain fEC funding centrally, its use should be directed by the group to whom it was given.*

**5.5** Professor Hough informed Council about the Report on Degree Classification issued by a group chaired by Professor Burgess to which the Society had given evidence. Arising from it trials were being carried out in a number of universities to test the use of student transcripts coupled, where appropriate, with a 'European Diploma'. While Professor Burgess was critical of the honours classification system it was acknowledged that there would be considerable resistance to its abolition.

## **6. AWARDS**

**6.1** Professor Howarth introduced the report of the 'A' Awards Panel. Before considering the panel's recommendations he noted that the strength of the field for the Fowler Award suggested that consideration should be given to the creation of additional, if less prestigious, awards for scientists at early career stages (e.g. best paper in MN by a postdoctoral or postgraduate researcher). This was remitted to the Higher Education Committee for further examination. He also reported that the committee had been invited to suggest names for the Whitrow Lecture. It was agreed that the panel's suggestions would be considered by Officers and a firm proposal brought to Council. Finally, the panel recommended that all the reserve candidates should be carried forward automatically for consideration the following year. This was agreed.

Council proceeded to approve the following recommendations for the 2009 'A' awards:

The Gold Medal (A) to Professor David A. Williams  
The Eddington Medal to Professor James Pringle  
The Jackson-Gwilt Medal to Professor Peter Ade  
The Fowler Award (A) to Dr Sarah Bridle  
The Award for Service (A) to Professor Sir Arnold Wolfendale  
Group Award (A) to the SCUBA team  
The Darwin Lecturer: Dr Neil Gehrels be invited to lecture on 'SWIFT and its results'  
Honorary Fellows : Prof. Matthew Colless (AAO, Australia); Prof. Janusz Sylwester (Wrocław, Poland); Prof. Bernard Schutz (MPI Gravitational Physics, Potsdam, Germany)

**6.2** Professor Bailey introduced the Report of the 'G' Awards Panel. He noted that exoplanets, like the Sun, appeared to be an area of growing and overlapping interest between the "A" and "G" subject areas. Each case would have to be allocated to the appropriate panel following individual scrutiny.

Council went on to approve the following recommendations:

Gold Medal (G) to Professor Eric Priest  
Price Medal to Dr Malcolm Sambridge  
Fowler Award to Dr David Tsiklauri  
Award for Service to Geophysics to Dr David Kerridge  
Harold Jeffreys Lecturer: Dr Emma Bunce be invited to Lecture on "Recent Observations of Saturn's Magnetosphere Using Cassini"  
Honorary Fellows: Professor Joseph Burns (USA); Professor Jitendra Goswami (India); Dr Athlestan Fredrick Spilhaus (USA)

**6.3** The President added that to allow time for candidates to be informed the public announcement of the 2009 awards would be deferred until the Ordinary Meeting on January 9<sup>th</sup> 2009

## **7. FINANCE**

**7.1** The Treasurer introduced the Finance Committee Report and invited the Executive Secretary to give details of the Charities Trustee Liability Insurance which, following the decision at the October meeting of Council, had been taken out through 'Chubb' viz 1£m per incident or per period of cover for trustees' 'wrongful acts', these being defined as any 'wrongful act or omission, error, misstatement, misleading statement, neglect or breach of duty committed, attempted or allegedly committed or attempted'. He added that, naturally, this excluded deliberately dishonest or fraudulent acts or omissions and any intentional breaches of law.

**7.2** The Treasurer outlined the banking arrangements made since the last Council meeting when he had been tasked with transferring the Society's cash holdings from the National Westminster Bank to HSBC as soon as possible. Following talks with HSBC it became clear that the transfer could not be accomplished quickly and, therefore, as an interim measure, he had diversified the risk by depositing £590,000 via and with the advice of 'Newton', the Society's investment manager, in four banks viz NY Mellon, Montreal, Nordlandbank and RBS. The Treasurer explained that the deposits would earn comparable returns to what would have been achieved in the Nat West and, until December 31 2008, would be managed by Newton free of charge.

In the meantime, the Finance Committee had scrutinised the proposal from HSBC to provide *all* the Society's banking services and had agreed to recommend to Council that this should be accepted not least because of the comprehensive internet banking platform 'HSBCnet' that would be available. This could be set up to mimic the current paper-based two-signatory payment system, facilitate electronic management of the Society's financial transactions and yield operational economies (which would offset the slightly lower rates of interest offered).

In response to a question the Treasurer said, at a later stage, he would examine the merits of reducing risk exposure by operating accounts in 2 banks. He agreed, though, to ask the Finance Committee immediately to consider how a better return on cash holdings might be obtained, for example, by converting part of them into short term bonds.

Council accepted the recommendation of the Finance Committee and approved the following resolution, incorporating inflation adjustments to delegated authorities, to give effect to the transfer of the Society's banking business to HSBC viz

*'The Council of the Royal Astronomical Society, at a meeting held at Burlington House on 11<sup>th</sup> December 2008, at 1.00pm, acting under the authority of Paragraph 9 of the Charter dated 7<sup>th</sup> March 1831 and Section II.3 and Section V.15 of the Bye-laws has **resolved** the following:*

- *To change its principal banking arrangements from NatWest to HSBC. The existing mandate for the Society's bank accounts at NatWest is to be terminated upon closure of the Society's accounts there.*
- *The accounts to be opened and their structure will initially be as follows. Accounts may be deleted or added to, or their properties changed, by the signatories mandated from time to time by the Council (starting with those named below).*

<b>Fund</b>	<b>Currency</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Cheque Book</b>	<b>Pay-In Book</b>
<i>General</i>	<i>£Stg.</i>	<i>Current</i>	<i>No (see Note 1 below)</i>	<i>Yes</i>
	<i>£Stg.</i>	<i>Business Money Manager</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>No</i>
	<i>£Stg.</i>	<i>Money Market</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>No</i>
	<i>US\$</i>	<i>Deposit</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>
	<i>Euro</i>	<i>Deposit</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<i>Restricted</i>	<i>£Stg.</i>	<i>Current</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>
	<i>£Stg.</i>	<i>Business Money Manager</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>No</i>
	<i>£Stg.</i>	<i>Money Market</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>No</i>

*Note 1: The Society uses Sage Laser Cheques.*

- *HSBCnet to be set up and operated to facilitate electronic banking under dual control.*
- *Commercial cards are to be held by the following Society employees:*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Credit Limits</b>
<i>Mr. David Elliott</i>	<i>£4,000</i>
<i>Mr. Ronald Wiltshire</i>	<i>£1,000</i>

- *Council mandates the following signatories to open and operate its accounts at HSBC:*
  - *Professor Paul Geoffrey Murdin, OBE (Treasurer)*
  - *Dr. Ian Andrew Crawford (Secretary)*
  - *Mr. David Elliott (Executive Secretary)*
  - *Mr. John Robertson Struthers (Accountant).*

- *The bank mandate is to operate under the following rules, which replace the previous arrangements (Council meeting 1 July 1996, renewed 11 October 2007):*
  1. *Society cheques, direct debit authorisations and the like shall require two signatures. Electronic transfers shall require two authorisations. References to 'cheques' and 'signatories' shall extend to electronic transfers, with appropriate technical changes.*
  2. *Cheques will be signed by either the Executive Secretary or the Accountant and usually countersigned by the Treasurer. In the absence of the Treasurer one of the other mandated Fellows may sign in the Treasurer's place.*
  3. *The Executive Secretary and the Accountant may sign, on behalf of the Royal Astronomical Society, cheques in payment for:*
    - 3.1. *Cash (not exceeding the sum of £4,000 per month).*
    - 3.2. *Salaries.*
    - 3.3. *HM Revenue & Customs dues.*
    - 3.4. *Postage credits to franking machine, for the distribution of notices to members, no limit.*
    - 3.5. *Business reply service facilities (no single payment exceeding £4,000).*
    - 3.6. *Refunds to members (no single payment exceeding £500).*

*All payments made under Section 3 must be for routine transactions in connection with the day-to-day running of the Society and not for any special purpose or project. Payments must be accounted to the Treasurer as soon as practicable thereafter.*

*Signed on 11<sup>th</sup> December 2008, for and on behalf of the Royal Astronomical Society, by the President of the Council and Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Society and by the Secretary'*

## **8. ORGANISATION AND STRUCTURE**

**8.1** At this point the President vacated the chair to Vice-President Professor Cruise and left the meeting. Dr Barber introduced his paper on a Presidential honorarium, explaining that, rather than recommendations, it summarized the issues as a basis for discussion. Reflecting the comments received from 7 members of Council, he noted that the Society was playing a more active role in seeking to influence science policy and that the resultant demands on the President had increased significantly. One way of recognizing this would be by offering an honorarium, subject to obtaining the necessary approvals of the Charity Commission, though it was not clear what amount would be appropriate nor whether it should be paid to the President or to his/her employer as compensation for time spent on Society business. Dr Barber added that it might be timely also to consider the method used to appoint Presidents, as well as the duration of their term of office.

In discussion, there was complete agreement that the role of the President had become more onerous but no consensus that an honorarium was the best way of alleviating this. It was suggested that a greater sharing of responsibilities among officers and other members of Council and/or providing more office based administrative support might be more appropriate. There could also be merit in reviewing the way in which Presidents are selected. As a first step, Council instructed the Executive Secretary to seek the views of past Presidents.

**8.2** At this point the President returned to the meeting and resumed the chair. The Treasurer was invited to present a paper summarising the grants provided by the Society for IYA 2009 related events. He noted that Council had authorised expenditure of £250,000, including contributions for the IYA Coordinator's office, and that, with the completion of the second grants round, this had now been fully committed to the support of some 51 projects. In addition it had been agreed to support 2 events from the Lockyer Fund and a further 2 from

the Society's Research and Grants Fund. The RAS awards, he believed, had leveraged support from other organisations in the region of £0.5M to £1M, in addition to volunteers' time. Noting that there is evidence that other smaller, perhaps more informal events, had yet to be planned he suggested to Council that an additional £50K could be added to the provision for the normal 2009 grant rounds (in February and August) to deal with late applications. This was approved as was, retrospectively, the expenditure from the Lockyer and the Research and Grants Funds. Council suggested that the editor of 'A&G' might wish to feature the events being supported by Society grants in a future edition of the journal. Finally, the Treasurer drew Council's attention to the leaflet produced by the Astronomical Heritage Committee which examined the astronomical significance of Stonehenge. English Heritage had agreed to make it available at the site for purchase at a nominal sum, in conjunction with the activities which the Committee was planning to hold there during IYA2009.

**8.3** Professor Cruise gave a report on the activities of the International Committee. He informed Council that the Society's premises would be used to host a meeting of Learned Societies interested in sharing their experience of promoting capacity development; that the UK membership of the IAU was being up-dated and that comments would be sent, through the Royal Society, on the draft strategy of the International Council for Science and Technology (ICSU).

**8.4** The Executive Secretary informed Council that, with the agreement of the Society's publishing partners, the DGG, Professor Jeannot Trampert had accepted an invitation to succeed Professor Cindy Ebinger as GJI Editor in Chief from the beginning of 2009. Professor Trampert, a seismologist at Utrecht University and an editor of GJI, had been a post-doctoral student at Oxford. Council warmly approved the appointment and recorded its deep appreciation for the contribution of Professor Ebinger.

**8.5** The Executive Secretary announced that in advance of its launch in January 2009 almost 40 people had applied to become 'Friends of the RAS' and encouraged Council to publicise this new membership scheme.

## **9. OTHER**

**9.1** The Executive Secretary informed Council that the portrait of former President, Professor Rowan-Robinson, commissioned from Jane Freeman had been delivered to Burlington House while a collection of photographic portraits by Lucinda Douglas-Menzies of RAS Presidents and Gold Medallists would be launched at the reception following the following day's scientific meetings.

**9.2** The Executive Secretary noted that the Eddington (Cambridge) and Grubb-Parsons (Durham) lectures for 2009, which were part sponsored by the Society, would be given in March by respectively Professor Andrea Ghez and Professor Rob Kennicutt. Arrangements would be made for repeat lectures in Burlington House.

**9.3** The joint-Societies Burlington House Lecture Series in 2009, the Executive Secretary informed Council, would focus on Darwin and Galileo. Professor Shea, the Galileo Professor of the History of Science, University of Padua, had accepted an invitation to lecture on 26 October 2009 on 'The New World of Galileo'

**9.4** Council approved the following candidates for Election to Fellowship listed in OR/11/08 & OR/12/08 and posted on the RAS web site.

Arumugam	Vinodiran
Arundal	Richard
Aston	Anselm
Atwater	James
Benn	Chris
Breidaks	Ilmars
Campbell	Paul
Canty	James
Carter	James
Challinor	Adrian
Chapman	Steven
Chorley	Nicky
Cornwall	Marc
Crawshaw	Christopher
Dickinson	Nathan
Dow	Michael
Dryer	Ben
Duffy	Maria
Dunne	Loretta
Dyke	Eleanor
Ferreira	Ana
Falder	James
Few	Christopher
Gallagher	Andy
Goodman	Peter
Hamon	Rod
Harrison	Samantha
Hilditch	Scott
House	Elisa
Johns	Frank
Kanas	Nick
Karlsson	Nanna
Kay	Scott
King	Simon
Kipping	David
Kunawicz	Nadya
Madjarska	Maria
Mann	Peter
Mason	Joanne
Mason	Jonathon
Mehta	Jim
Morris	Antony
O'Brien	Robert
Osinowo	Olawale
Peacock	Mark
Pearson	Jaz
Praagman	Anneke
Raccanelli	Alvise
Raychaudhury	Somak



Richardson	Katy
Rowlinson	Beatrix
Sharp	Peter
Simpson	Allen
Stott	John
Summers	Lee
Swan	Stephen
Thomas	Trevor
Thomson	Grace
Trampert	Jeannot
Trevelyan	Richard
Went	Daniel
White	Christopher
Williams	Anthony
Young	Andrew

**9.5** As requested at the October meeting of Council the Operations Plan was tabled, for information, by the Treasurer. It was agreed that this could replace the financial information hitherto incorporated in the ‘Officers Reports’

**9.6** The Minutes of the A&G meetings of 10<sup>th</sup> October and 14<sup>th</sup> November 2008, following correction, were approved and signed.

## **10. AOB**

**10.1** The first book published under the agreement between the Society and ‘Springer’ was placed on the table.

The meeting rose at 1635

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A.C. Fabian  
President

11<sup>th</sup> February 2009